Jackson Plans Assassination Investigation

CHICAGO (AP) — Because "the threat of death hangs over everyone present at the assassination," the Rev. Jesse Jackson has opened his own investigation to see if Dr. Martin Luther King's convicted murderer, James Earl Ray, acted alone.

Prompted by a letter from Ray, Jackson asked permission Thursday to interview Ray at Tennessee's Bushy Mountain prison. He said he hoped for an answer from Tennessee officials by the end of the day.

Ray's letter to Jackson, dated July 21, said: "I did not kill Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"I believe the evidence that I can give you about how I was used, moved around the country, paid substantial sums of money, directed to buy a rifle and directed to report to Memphis on April 4, 1968, will be helpful in establishing the fact that there was a conspiracy to murder Dr. King . . ."

"I fear greatly for his life," Jackson said in an interview yesterday. "I fear greatly for my own life. The threat of death hangs over everyone present at the assassination because I am convinced Ray didn't act alone and there are still evil forces at large."

Jackson, now head of Operation Push, was standing near King when he was fatally shot outside a second floor motel room in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968.

Jackson said he wants to become involved now because Ray is "the Jack Ruby of this case." Ruby, who died in jail before his trial, killed Lee Harvey Oswald, President John F. Kenndey's accused assassin.

"We know he (Ray) is at least tangentially involved — to what degree no one knows," Jackson said. "He says he was used and I believe it, although to what extend I don't know.

"Since I was on the scene and remember the scenario so vividly I am certain Ray could not have gotten down Main Street and across the state line without help.

"Because he did not act alone others involved are still walking the street. Ray is our closest lead to those people."

JACKSON SAID a Ray trial would force the FBI to open its files. "The FBI is withholding information that it considers irrelevent or confidential," Jackson said. "Those are value judgements that could be colored by the FBI's possible role in the assasination or the FBI's failure to prevent it."

Ray's letter to Jackson asked for a new trial saying: "At a trial I am sure I will be able to prove that I am innocent and the secret FBI files which we will see at the trial will lead to the real murderers. . ."

Ray, now 50, pleaded guilty and was sent to prison for 99 years without a full trial.